

# FAULTY TOWERS

**M**ILES COPELAND is prone to saying things like "Cracking America and the world is a big job and we're going to have to work really hard this year to do it." And he's prone to uttering them in a brash American high pitch of enthusiasm that sets many a British tooth on edge. He is so far from being the hail-fellow-well-met-old-pal-old-buddy of everyone in the music business that the nearest I've heard to a paean of praise for his personal charms was, "Well I'm sure he's better than 85 per cent of the monsters who work for record companies anyway".

So this article isn't here to tell you he's cuddly. What I would suggest is that Miles Copeland is arguably doing more for your favourite bands, as yet unborn bands you don't even know you're going to love and the future of new music as a whole than anyone else currently on the scene. This is the story so far...

The new wave established itself not only as a musical revolution but as a viable record company investment in the UK. However, there was little interest in it anywhere else and in particular the American market was being effectively sat upon by dinosaurs of various breeds and ages from Wings through Fleetwood Mac to Boston. Artistically, culturally and financially the new wave was being forced to survive/develop within far tighter limits than any previous pop music movement.

Over there mega-albums had become the starting point which, as this year's sales decline proved, was like making a cake from the icing down. Advances to bands were regularly in the 100-200,000 dollar range and recording costs much the same. So you had to sell half a million before going into profit.

Whatever the fans' feelings were, live gigs had long since ceased to be the source of all the excitement. The industry was playing for such high stakes that it demanded concerts be part of the product pushing process. The vast impersonal tour-of-the-album syndrome...which would have carried on as monotonously as ever but for its sudden rejection by the youth of America some time around the turn of the year.

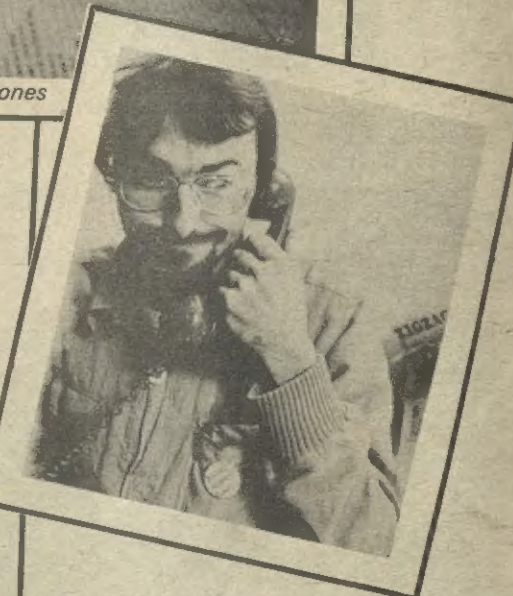
Backtrack. You've possibly just heard of Copeland as manager of the Police and Squeeze and owner of the independent Faulty Products and its allied labels and enterprises. He was the only American in a prominent position on the hustling side of the British new wave. He was used to success in the States with his previous enterprise, BTM (Wishbone Ash, Renaissance, Climax Blues Band, Al Stewart etc). But he also had no money to buy his way in on the existing lavish terms because he was still recovering from going bust and liquidating BTM.

This combination of circumstances and personal drives made him go out and look for footholds in the American scene when nearly all of the new bands were just reading about the scholastic ventures of the Pistols and the Clash, the heroes and market leaders after all, and concluding it was no-go.

With Squeeze and then the Police he took a Laker Skytrain flight out. They hired a truck big enough for band, a roadie and a small backline and took off to rediscover and, often, reopen the American club circuit. Miles and brother Ian, then working



THE FAULTY EMPIRE BUILDERS: top Andy Phillips, centre Miles Copeland, bottom Nick Jones



for a major agency, would go out on the streets in the smaller towns where the city hall or the sports arena were the only known gigs and stop the first kid they saw with anything like a new wave disc/badge/haircut and start asking questions. They'd back track to the record shop, the local radio station until finally they'd come up with someone who was into promoting an unknown English band, very neat, very cheap.

The Copelands eased the margins a little further by buying their own van and backline which they rented to the bands at a break-even rate of 250 dollars a week instead of the commercial hire charges of maybe 800 and they were ready to go.

**T**HE OUTCOME has been an accelerating flow of bands, roughing it for sure but going where 12 months ago no punk had gone before. Penetration stomped round more than 30 dates in as many days and made out. Ultravox are reported to have made an unprecedented 11,000 dollars on their US debut while 999, who don't have an American label, seem to be approaching the transatlantic commuter stage having profited by an alleged 25,000 dollars on their two trips this year (which, if true, is a sight better than they could have done back home).

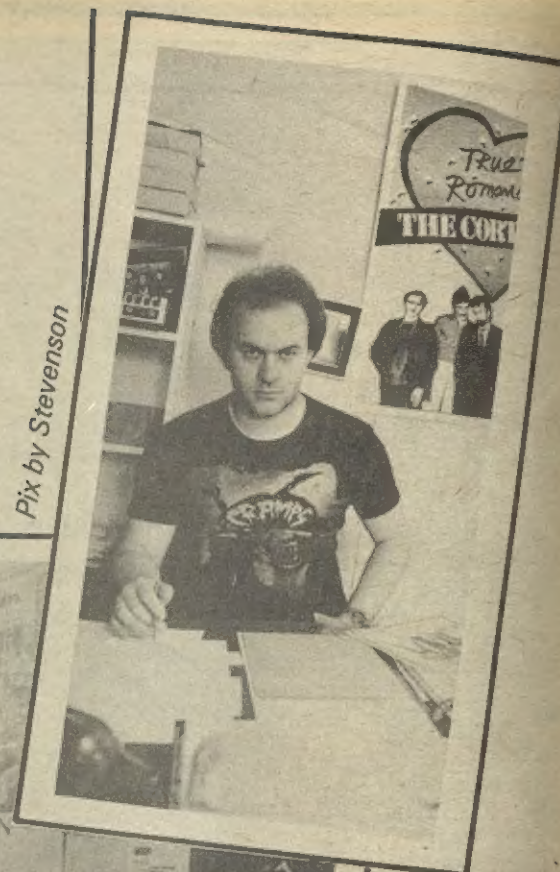
Well, if there is a milligramme of bad news in all this someone please point it out

to me. Bands get thrills, musical cross-fertilisation. Maybe a little alleviation of the well-known crushing poverty. What's more their demeaning dependence on record companies is eased and that gives them more choice about every aspect of their careers, especially the artistic.

Most important, if this really is the tide rather than a freak wave, if others can adopt and adapt the idea to give the Copelands both support and competition (any monopoly being potentially dangerous), the focus of rock will be back on the live gig. Band, audience, blood, sweat and tears. Probably that shift has already happened in this country to a creative degree but, barring t'revolution, we need America to go the same way simply because the fans there have a majority shareholding in the world market i.e. they can feed a lot more musicians than us.

But of course the record side has to be taken care of too and that brings us to the latest Copeland coup. With the Faulty labels, Rough Trade and Throbbing Gristle's Industrial he has set up the International Record Syndicate (IRS = Internal Revenue Service gettit?). They negotiated a deal with A&M whereby all their releases would be distributed in the States.

A peculiarity of the contract is that it gives the artists no advances, a fact which, as Copeland tells it, hit his American



Pix by Stevenson

## THE DEBUT ALBUM



lawyer where it hurts: "He said 'But Miles you gotta ask for money. Come on, let me ask for half a million.' I told him he didn't understand. We want total freedom. The minute we take an advance they're going to have the right to say 'This isn't commercial enough. We won't get our money back on this one.' Anyway I left it with him and next day he calls me and says sorta slow 'Miles...a very unusual deal.'"

The thing is with the records already made, and on the cheap at that, the whole thrust of IRS was for high royalties (said to be 'unprecedented' which might put them in the 25-30 per cent range).

The Police did the dry run on this front too. 'Outlandos D'Amour' cost £3,000 to make and it was scheduled for Stewart Copeland's Illegal label until Miles got turned on by 'Roxanne' and took an interest. After testing the water with a couple of singles they assigned the album to A&M for a 'zero advance' and that's why today Sting can occasionally be caught yelling at the sky "I'm rich!" rather than muttering to his neighbour "I'm paying back my record company. Buy a starving rock star a beer guv?"

The IRS deal does give A&M some kind of option to take up any outfit they deem likely to 'break', a limitation which may not suit all concerned. But as with the agency there's nothing to stop others stealing the

CONTINUES PAGE 35

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NEW ALBUM BY

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H A M M I L LFAULTY  
TOWERS

FROM PAGE 34



POLICE DRUMMER: Stuart Copeland, Miles' brother: "Miles is a wonderful human being"

Pic by J.H. Fumancovsky

general idea and making their own arrangements with the company of their choice.

My fond hope is that these radical manoeuvres in the dark of the recession could work like a ferret down the bermudas of the dormant music business. Sod the seven-million mega-album. Instead build a broad base on seventy bands selling a hundred thousand each, low cost, no waste, and everybody taking an acceptable cut. Security and excitement in unlikely tandem. Music moving fast from the street up, the way it should. Supply meeting demand not vice versa. An industry serving a living culture but (imperatively) sustained by it too. Hot sounds, inspiration, fans happy, musicians eating, art, employment. Ah...

At least part of this dream could be fulfilled if the coincidence of idealism and horse-sense that triggered it can be maintained and balanced. And the immediate responsibility rests on one of the most slagged-off figures on the scene, just about the last candidate you'd pick to be champion of a generation's culture. The rest of this feature is an attempt to indicate just what manner of man this Miles Axe Copeland 111 might be.

**F**OR CLUES I spent a few hours at Faulty talking to various MAC3 employees who said things like: "No he's not a dictator. We each have independence in our own areas". "He's not into hierarchy and he's not a materialist. He won't stand on ceremony about who does what. Well he plastered and painted these walls himself. And if he sees the bog's dirty he'll clean it". "He's got no small talk. I think that's why he often seems rude". "I expect you'll find him talking a lot more about product than about the people who work for him". "Miles wouldn't be where he is today without me — and the other people in this office who've been loyal to him when he was down. I hope that comes across."

Then in the Police caravan at the Reading Fest I got a 15-minute discourse from Stuart Copeland on the theme of his brother, including the following observations: "Miles is a wonderful human being. At least he's wonderful though I'm not sure he's human. He might be a robot..."

"The way to use him is to talk to him once a week, tell him what's happening and he will advise you about the next move. He's good on overall strategy but bad on important details — such as lending my drums to Chelsea when I needed them in Newcastle for a TV show. Like any manager he has to be watched very carefully..."

"He doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, doesn't have a car and he's really puritan about drugs. He doesn't spend anything except on bands. That's his hobby. I try to persuade him to buy new clothes but he never does."

"Miles is honest. I don't mean he doesn't tell lies. But he doesn't steal." At which Sting popped in with his quotable summation: "If Miles had been born in the last century he would have been a Presbyterian minister. A hellfire and damnation preacher."

After a misfire or three, one because I

wasn't ready and the others because of ongoing Copeland chaos situations, I got to him on a tranquil Sunday afternoon at his parents' London base, a modest mansion in St John's Wood.

Miles Copeland sat on an old sofa, talked very loud, tore strips off a section of the *Observer* when thoughtful, lurched suddenly forward or sideways when the rockets were firing under his passionate imagination, thumbed his nose at defeated foes remembered.

Maybe he was nervous: "I was born in the States...hey! what am I talkin' about? I was born in London." And Stuart near Washington and Ian in Syria. The cosmopolitan catalogue was occasioned by Miles Axe Copeland 11's career with the US diplomatic corps and, for a spell, the CIA.

MAC3 grew up mostly in the Middle East in an atmosphere which must have made remarkably little distinction between power games and parlour games. Ambassadors, sheikhs and dignitaries all the way up to President Nasser of Egypt were regular house guests. And when he was five he was around when his father played a significant part in deposing one president and creating another.

In the late 40s in Syria a jolly evening's noshing and joshing *chez* Copeland on the theme of military coups ended with one General Zaeem convinced it could be done and that he was the man to take over and keep the reds at bay. Copeland 11 opined that the General was a democratic chap and enquired of the State Department back in Washington whether he could lend support.

Their reaction was probably bug-eyed horror expressed officially as orders not to interfere. But Zaeem was hot, Copeland 11 was as much a maverick as his kids have proved, so they went ahead anyway. Zaeem had his revolution, became president, became a boil on the backside of the country and was machine-gunned on the steps of his palace six months later.

Young Miles suggested that American (and his father's) foreign policy had become a lot more sophisticated since those cowboy days. But he could hardly fail to have been caught up in the excitement: "I guess as a kid I did think I'd like to be in the CIA but my father put me off that because he foresaw that public acceptance of the agency would make it basically a *boring job*, that you wouldn't be able to make a move without being criticised so you'd end up doing very little. I've never been embarrassed that my dad was in the CIA."

He surged into analyses of the political scene in Iran and Afghanistan to support his argument that the CIA were really necessary. I couldn't begin to dispute with his detailed information, though I winced on principle. MAC3 is not a liberal.

**C**OPELAND TOOK a BA in history and political science then a Master's degree in the economics of underdevelopment. He was loaded to the gunnells with information and attitudes which were to prove utterly useless to him: "Having grown up in the Middle East what

CONTINUES PAGE 37

FAULTY  
TOWERS

FROM PAGE 36

I thought I'd be doing was understanding what it took to put an underdeveloped country into the twentieth century."

I suggested that was a false correlation of time and quality of life.

"Yeah, we mistakenly assumed they wanted a lot of things they didn't want, democracy being one of them. I became rather disenchanted because I realised that with a lot of countries the best they could hope for would be that they would stand still."

"Then I met a rock 'n' roll group in Beirut, they said 'How about managing us?' I said 'That sounds like fun' and my whole college career I just put on the shelf. They were called Rupert's People. They'd got in trouble with this shady Iranian who'd hired them. The keyboards player, John Tour, went on to Renaissance."

"They got me into the business. It was a switch to developing underdeveloped groups I guess. I'd always liked taking a wreck and making it good — that was the fun when I got my first car. That could be what makes me tick."

Copeland came back to the UK with Rupert's People and BTM began to shape itself rapidly as management and record label. Now he believes that at this stage success, measured in cash, was his only challenge and that this was "a serious business mistake".

The pleasures he recalls were drawn from such things as helping Wishbone Ash arise from the state where two of them and their girlfriends were living in one bedsit to wealth enough to buy a stately home each.

But the pains were legion: "I have been in a position where I was almost solely responsible for the success of a group and once they made it they decided to dispense with my services. Climax did that. What's gratifying to me is that the day they left me was the day they disappeared."

"Sure I was upset when they left me. That would never have happened if I hadn't been persistent, pushing them back in the studio to get the right single. So in effect I felt they robbed me of my talent when they went..."

I'm not sure whether Miles harbours more malice than the average or whether he's just less polite/dishonest than us Brits. Memories of his stable of 'progressive' bands continued to draw the venom: "In '74 there was the recession. Acts that had been going out for five thousand a night came down to two. But the bands wouldn't cut down their expenditures so I had to *eat it!* I mean, Darryl Way said once 'I expect this company to keep me in the style to which I'm accustomed'. They all acted as if the company, the world, owed them a living."

A period of balancing on the cash-flow tightrope with no safety net of reserves ended when the giant Startrucken European tour Miles had arranged to boost Wishbone Ash financially although it was a fave with the fans. Copeland was cleaned out and BTM liquidated (a lot of his sweat since then has been shed to pay off eighty thousand dollars in personal debts, which he has now completed).

"That was when Renaissance told me 'You've got no money any more so we don't want to be with you'. That was their exact words! My talent didn't mean anything to them. There were a lot of people wandering round the business saying 'Well, that's it for Miles'."

**M**ILES AXE Copeland 111 was out on Oxford Street peddling posters to purchase his next crust. And punk was born: "It was like a light bulb going on in my head. This was a total escape from the big tours, big studios morass I'd got myself into. A lot of people said I wasn't honest in what I was doing because one day I'm in progressive and the next I'm in punk. Well I believed in what I was doing more than the rest because I had seen the other side. I'd been through the shit of it."

"Sure when I saw the Clash at first I thought it was ridiculous because those guys could hardly play. It took time to adjust my perceptions. But then I got into the excitement of it which is what I'd been missing. Now I can't listen to any of my old bands. There was nothing inside them *burning* to get out." He took his turn as an agent ("the scumbag of the business") and got his fingers burned acting for the Pistols whose office was upstairs from his then —

one McLaren trick was to let Miles set up some dates, cancel, and then tell the Press that the Pistols had been banned by fascistic local authorities.

Next came Stewart's initiative with the 'Fallout' single and launching the new labels: "That was another turning point. The *thrill* of recording your act, taking the tape and getting the lacquer made, the plate...I went to the Linguaphone factory for pressing, I went to the printers who did the sleeve and the labels. I picked up that finished product and went personally to the shops to sell it. I saw a kid walk in and buy one. It was total involvement. Christ it was GREAT!"

"Everybody was in A&R. Stewart, Gene, Mark P. they were always talking about this and that new group they'd seen. I'd been used to artists who were *jealous*. Screw or be screwed. But these musicians were asking me to *help* the other guy. I was floored."

That's the annotated history. I wanted more on the modus operandi, how an abrasive soul like him with all the easy social graces of a warthog could achieve any kind of working relationship with allegedly temperamental artists. He stressed that he was forceful but not rigid.

"In fact I don't like dealing with groups who won't argue with me. Because what I am if anything is a great catalyst. The artist can lose touch as much as a manager can. They *need* someone they can battle against. By arguing you develop your ideas, it crystallises your true feelings."

"For instance I was unsure about 'Up The Junction' as a single. I thought it was too MOR. Glenn Tilbrook was convinced it was the one. Chris Difford wasn't sure so we sat down and talked and Glenn's conviction got to me. I could have imposed my original opinion but I didn't."

"What riles me is bands who come to me and say 'What do we do now Miles?' Jesus! It has to come from within them."



A FAULTY PAST: Wishbone Ash...

Pic by Dave Ashdown



A FAULTY FUTURE: Squeeze



...and Annie Haslam

Pic by Chuck Pollin

They're the ones on stage, not me!"

I can certainly see the virtues of a manager presenting himself to the artist as an assault course to be overcome, testing and strengthening them, but what happens when you're at loggerheads, a stand-off?

"It hasn't happened in this period though it did previously with Renaissance. If I can't respect a band and they can't respect me I lose interest totally. If Wishbone criticise me it will be because I spent time on other things. Damn right! Because they wouldn't listen to me any more! They were *robbing* me of my participation in their career and I felt cheated. They got what they deserved from me."

Miles reckons his significant insight on the new wave was to recognise it as the culture of a new-generation while the other old hands were moaning about its lack of musical finesse: "Since when has music had anything to do with it? We're in the culture business, the *expression* business."

"So I was out there preaching that anyone who said it wasn't going to happen was a total idiot. That was tantamount to saying that nobody under 25 was going to happen."

"Right now we have a job. We have to take this generation and make it fulfil itself. It does need help. I need the help of A&M in America. I've told them some of the groups on IRS won't get played on the radio but they are just as important. The way Frank Zappa, who never had a gold album, was important to the previous generation. The world would be a sorrier place without Zappa — or the Fall, Alternative TV or the Pop Group."

"Now I also have groups who do sell lots of records. The Police have given me the power to release the Fall in the States. Power can be used to help the weak."

"So when I make my million...if I want to *be* seened *genuinely* puzzled at himself here)...maybe I'll want to pull the ladder

up. I dunno. Some of the punk bands did want to. Much as I like the Clash I resent one thing they did. They had an ad campaign in America which said 'Clash: the only group that matters'."

"I hate that because to me the only reason the Clash are important is because they were the leaders of a generation. If they say none of the other bands count then the Clash don't count, they negate their own importance. It's an insult to the other bands and the kids who follow the Clash. I hope Joe Strummer doesn't really think that way."

**R**IGHT THEN, Rip-offs. I couldn't prod him with anything more than nasty rumours but Miles came up with his own evidence for the prosecution (while entering a plea in mitigation).

Once, as BTM crumbled beneath him, he had inadvertently banked a Wishbone Ash royalty cheque for some thousands without giving the band their percentage. He realised what had happened when the next Performing Rights Society statement came through. This coincided with the Startrucken debacle and a large wad of notes going astray in Europe.

Copeland says he apologised abjectly, rescinded all contractual claims on the band, and set about the long haul of repaying them (without deducting his managerial 30 per cent from the sums). So he admits to inefficiency but denies sharp practice abjectly.

Lastly he brought up a matter which obviously irks him: "People have accused me of being rude. In fact there's been enough of it to make me think it might be true. Well maybe it's genetic. The make-up of my face, I guess I look angry. I'm always getting this 'What's wrong? Miles?' when I'm having a great time."